

CHSSCS students recognized for hatchery program work

Bright ideas, solid research and teamwork won four Cape Hatteras Secondary School of Coastal Studies students a berth as semifinalists in the Christopher Columbus Awards, part of a program sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation.

This is a nationwide program that challenges middle school students to explore opportunities for positive change in their communities.

These students are working toward their shared vision to help restore local oyster populations. Together with their classmates and coaching from teachers Tracy Shisler and Amber Bradshaw — and support from UNCCH Coastal Studies Institute's education programs coordinator John McCord — they have worked to create an artificial oyster reef with the goal of replenishing oyster populations. That's the hope of the eighth grade team of Ashley Hodges, Kailee Peno, Jacob Dixon and Evan Haas.

Just two months after it was built the students snorkeled on the reef to collect data to determine what they had accomplished. They found that approximately 43 percent of the reef showed signs of oyster recruitment. That translates to approximately 1,300 oysters growing on the reef. In addition to UNC-CH CSI (Coastal Studies Institute), the students' efforts were supported by North Carolina Sea Grant, the Division of Marine Fisheries, and several scientists at the university level. Team members Kailee Peno and Ashley Hodges said, "We are excited that our efforts are receiving recognition from this influential foundation; we hope that our work continues to pay off."

A panel of scientists and experts in science education judged this idea as one of the top 30 in the 2009 Christopher Columbus Awards entries in the US. More than 1,600 students and coaches participated nationwide.